Frequently Asked Questions for the Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge

General Information

What are the objectives and activities of the Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge?

The Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge (Rural Jobs Accelerator) is an inter-agency initiative designed to support bottom-up, regional economic development strategies by providing rural regions with resources to plan and implement coordinated, flexible, regionally-customized activities to support job creation. The objectives of the Rural Jobs Accelerator are to:

(1) Accelerate distressed rural communities' ability to create jobs and strengthen their regional economies, and
(2) Help rural communities identify and maximize local assets, and connect to regional opportunities and self-identified clusters that demonstrate high-growth potential.

Which agencies are providing funding?

Total proposed funding for the Rural Jobs Accelerator is approximately $15 million, subject to the availability of appropriations. The Economic Development Administration (EDA) (providing up to $10 million) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Housing Service (providing up to $4.3 million) are collectively referred to as the Primary Funding Agencies. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) (providing up to $500,000) and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) (providing up to $500,000) are collectively referred to as the Regional Funding Partners.

How much funding has been appropriated to the Rural Jobs Accelerator?

Total proposed funding for the Rural Jobs Accelerator is approximately $15 million in direct Federal support from funding agencies. Subject to the availability of appropriations, EDA is making approximately $10 million available under its Economic Adjustment Assistance program, and USDA is making approximately $4.3 million available through the Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) program. Additionally, ARC is making approximately $500,000 available, and DRA is making approximately $500,000 available to clusters in their service regions. Another nine Federal agencies have committed to supporting Rural Jobs Accelerator recipients through technical assistance. This challenge is not funded with new Federal dollars, but instead leverages complementary existing Federal resources to assist communities in a more coordinated manner.

How much money will the winning clusters receive?

Awards are expected to range from approximately $715,000 to $965,000 per region through the funding agencies. EDA expects to make approximately 20 non-construction awards, with individual grant awards of up to $500,000. USDA expects to make

approximately 20 awards, with individual grant awards of up to $215,000. ARC expects to make approximately five awards to projects within their service region, with individual grant awards of up to $100,000. DRA expects to make approximately two awards to projects within their service region, with individual grant awards of up to $250,000.

What other agencies are supporting this initiative?

Recognizing that the U.S. Government has complementary resources that can support the development of vibrant regional economies in which clusters may thrive, Federal agencies and bureaus have committed to support Rural Jobs Accelerator recipients. Each applicant selected for funding will have the opportunity to receive assistance from a Federal Support Team made up of Federal staff of Funding Agencies and Support Agencies. The Federal Support Teams will help to ensure that successful applicants are aware of available Federal resources relevant to their project and region. The Federal Support Agencies for this challenge are the:

- Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NIST MEP)
- Department of Commerce, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)
- Denali Commission
- Department of Education
- Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA)
- Department of Energy
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities
- Small Business Administration (SBA)

Who is eligible to apply for funding?

For EDA:
The following entities are eligible to receive funding from EDA:
- District Organizations (as defined in 13 C.F.R. § 300.3);
- Indian Tribes or a consortium of Indian Tribes;
- States, cities, or other political subdivisions of a State, including a special purpose unit of a State or local government engaged in economic or infrastructure development activities, or a consortium of political subdivisions;
- Institutions of higher education or a consortium of institutions of higher education; or
- Public or private non-profit organizations or associations acting in cooperation with officials of a political subdivision of a State.

In addition, to be eligible for EDA funding, a project must be located in a region that, on the date EDA received the application, contains one or more subdivisions that meet at least one of the following economic distress criteria:

- An unemployment rate that is, for the most recent 24-month period for which data are available, at least one percentage point greater than the national average unemployment rate;
- Per capita income that is, for the most recent period for which data are available, 80 percent or less of the national average per capita income; or
- Has a "Special Need," as determined by EDA (as defined in 13 C.F.R. § 300.3).

For USDA:
The following entities are eligible to receive funding from USDA:

Qualified private, nonprofit, including faith-based and community organizations, in accordance with 7 C.F.R. Part 16, and public (including Tribal) intermediary organizations apply as intermediaries.

The intermediaries work with recipients who must be private nonprofit, including faith-based organizations, community-based housing and development organizations, low-income rural communities, or Federally-recognized Tribes based on the RCDI definitions of these groups. The recipient then provides assistance to beneficiaries who are entities or individuals that receive benefits from assistance provided by the recipient.

The recipient and beneficiary, but not the intermediary, must be located in an eligible rural area. The physical location of the recipient's office that will be receiving the financial and technical assistance must be in an eligible rural area. If the recipient is a low-income community, the median household income of the area where the office is located must be at or below 80 percent of the State or national median household income, whichever is higher.

Is this challenge funded with new Federal dollars?
This challenge leverages complementary existing Federal resources to assist communities in a more coordinated manner than through traditional approaches.

How can I register for the prospective applicant webinar held on March 20, 2012?
Please find the webinar registration at http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/RuralJobsAccelerator. A webinar recording will be made available after the webinar is held.

When will grants be awarded?
Subject to the availability of funding, successful applicants should expect to receive grant awards within approximately 60 days from the application closing date and time set out in the FFO. See section VII.A of the FFO for award notification information.

What is the difference between a Primary Funding Agency and a Regional Funding Partner?

The Primary Funding Agencies for this challenge are USDA and EDA. The Regional Funding Partners are ARC and DRA. Only applicants and projects located in the ARC and DRA service areas are eligible to receive funds from the applicable Regional Funding Partner.

What is a cluster?
Clusters are networks of interconnected firms and supporting institutions that accelerate innovation, business formation and expansion, and job creation. They provide a globally proven approach for developing regional economic prosperity.

Clusters may not conform to traditional notions of regional geographies, such as political jurisdictions or Federally defined metropolitan statistical areas. Clusters exist across the U.S. in urban, rural, suburban and multi-jurisdictional regions. Globally competitive industries may be anchored in a given region as the foundation of a cluster, but have networked assets (e.g., suppliers, investors, research partnerships) in other States or even abroad.

What are some examples of clusters?
Clusters can be found in central Iowa (wind energy), Wichita (aviation), Vermont (cheese making), and southeast Alaska (seafood). Clusters also span state lines. For example, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington benefit from a multi-State food-manufacturing cluster.

What kinds of clusters will be most competitive?
This competition recognizes that a diversity of clusters and associated industries play a vital role in helping the U.S. create an economy built to last. Competitive applications will provide strong evidence of supporting a high-growth cluster, clear descriptions of the region's needs and opportunities, the proposed project concept and scope of work, and clearly articulated projected impact and measurable outcomes overall and by Funding Agency.

Through this effort, the Federal government aims to direct funds in a smarter, more targeted way that leverages the partnerships in communities and regions, expands success and spurs private investment. This approach empowers local leaders to maximize their regional strengths and assets and create job opportunities to make their region more competitive. It acknowledges that the jobs of the future will be generated in local communities, not through a top-down approach from Washington, DC.

What is a region?
In general, a region is area defined as such because of identifiable common features, assets and challenges. There is no geographic restriction to what constitutes a region. Applicants have the flexibility to suggest geographies based on demonstrated analysis of quantitative and/or qualitative information about where and how the cluster targeted for development operates.

What is considered rural or a rural area?

As defined by USDA, "Rural" and "Rural Area" are: any area other than (i) a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants; and (ii) the urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to such city or town. Projects must benefit rural communities, but applicants need not be physically located in a rural community. For USDA funding, the recipient and beneficiary, but not the intermediary, must be located in an eligible rural area. The physical location of the recipient's office that will be receiving the financial and technical assistance must be in an eligible rural area.

For example, a county could have 500,000 residents and be entirely eligible if no individual city or town exceeds 50,000 or is in the urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to such city or town. If there is a city within the county with a population that exceeds 50,000, that city would not be able to participate in the in the Rural Innovation Accelerator program through the RCDI program.

USDA has a website that is included in the FFO where you can enter an address to determine whether the address is located in an eligible rural jurisdiction. That website is: http://eligibility.sc.egov.usda.gov/eligibility/welcomeAction.do?pageAction=RBSmenu&NavKev=property@13. Once you navigate to the website, click on the link that applies to the RCDI initiative.

Have the Federal Support Teams been designated?
No, the Federal Support Teams have not been designated yet.

What is TARIC?
Recognizing the importance of Regional Innovation Clusters (RICs) to the U.S. economy, the White House created the Taskforce for the Advancement of Regional Innovation Clusters (TARIC) to provide more streamlined support to RICs. TARIC agencies offer unique resources and expertise to help advance the long-term economic health of all regions of the U.S. TARIC recognizes that regions can benefit from coordinated, flexible, regionally-customized investments that link economic development, workforce development, and small business development with greater inclusion of historically underrepresented and excluded communities and stronger goals and metrics. Moreover, TARIC recognizes that globally competitive regions address housing, transportation, environmental protection, and other regional issues in alignment with cluster goals. Winning the future requires that regions address competitiveness and sustainability in a comprehensive way.

What is the White House Rural Council?
The White House Rural Council was established by Executive Order to address challenges in Rural America, build on the Administration's rural economic strategy, and improve the implementation of that strategy. The Council coordinates the Administration's efforts in rural America by performing three core functions: (1) streamlining and improving the effectiveness of Federal programs serving rural America; (2) engaging stakeholders, including farmers, ranchers, and local citizens, on issues and solutions in rural communities; and (3) promoting and coordinating private-sector partnerships. The Council focuses on job creation and economic

development by focusing on four key areas: opportunity, innovation, quality of life, and conservation.

Applications

Are applicants required to request funding from all funding sources?

An application team must apply for both EDA and USDA funding available under this FFO. If the team does not apply for both EDA and USDA funding, the application will be considered non-responsive and will not be reviewed. Applicants are not required to apply for ARC and DRA funds; although they are encouraged to do so if their project is located in either the ARC or DRA service area.

Can an applicant be selected for funding from one Primary Funding Agency (i.e. EDA), but not the other (USDA)?

The Primary Funding Agencies (USDA and EDA) intend to make their individual awards to the applicant teams representing approximately 20 regions selected under this competition; however, ARC and DRA may only fund projects within their respective regions.

Can applicants propose activities to support more than one cluster?

The FFO does not preclude activities that support more than one cluster. Applicants are required to propose one project with two distinct activities that support a minimum of one cluster. See section V.C of the FFO for a detailed description of the information that must be included in an application.

Can the project area be a subset of the region outlined in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) or alternative EDA approved strategic planning document?

Applicants have the flexibility to suggest geographies based on demonstrated analysis of quantitative and/or qualitative information about where and how the cluster targeted for development operates.

How do I get more information about the challenge?

Additional information about the challenge can be found at:
http:// www.rurdev.usda.gov/RuralJobsAccelerator

The application package on the grants.gov website only includes application forms for EDA, where do I find application forms for USDA?

Application forms for USDA can be found under the "Full Announcement" tab for the grants.gov Rural Jobs Accelerator. These forms must be uploaded as "attachments" to the application after they are completed.

What if I have additional questions about the process?

You can email any additional questions to the following email address: ruraljobsaccelerator@wdc.usda.gov, or call the appropriate EDA Regional Office contact or USDA Rural Development State Office contact listed in Appendix F of the FFO.

If our applicant team consists of two separate organizations, who must submit the application package on grants.gov?

The Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) for the organization that is applying for EDA funds must submit the application package on grants.gov. See section V.D of the FFO for grants.gov submission information.

How do I obtain application forms for ARC?

Application forms for ARC can be found on www.arc.gov/accelerate. Application forms must be submitted directly to ARC by emailing them to accelerate@arc.gov. See Appendix C of the FFO for more details.

How do I obtain application forms for DRA?

Application forms and submission information for DRA can be found on www.dra.gov. Application forms must be submitted directly to DRA. See Appendix D of the FFO for more details.

Can applicants, regions or clusters submit more than one application?

The FFO does not restrict the number of distinct project proposals one organization/applicant, region or cluster can submit; however, the Funding Agencies request that applicants kindly refrain from submitting multiple copies of the same application package. If multiple copies of an application are received, the Funding Agencies will only review the last application that was received.

Can an organization be part of more than one application team responding to the FFO?

The FFO does not restrict the number of application teams one organization can be a member of or affiliated with.

Does the budget narrative in the Project Description contain the budgets for all funding agencies?

Each budget narrative should be specific to the funding source. If you are applying for three funding sources, you will have three separate budget narratives, one for each funding source, so that each funding agency can monitor their grant. All three budget narratives will be shared with each funding agency. See also section V.C.2. of the FFO.

Can our organization submit this application if we have submitted a proposal for another EDA, USDA, ARC or DRA grant, or plan to in the future?

Yes, the Rural Jobs Accelerator FFO does not preclude applicants from applying for another grant opportunity.

Do applicants have to submit or have an approved Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to apply for EDA funds?

While a planning document is required to apply for EDA funds, if an approved CEDS is not available, applicants have the option of submitting an alternative strategic planning document that closely aligns with the requirements for a CEDS. The planning document does not need to be attached to the application if it has been previously submitted to EDA or is available on the internet. For more information on the CEDS requirement, see section V.C of the FFO.

Can organizations charge indirect costs to the grants?

Yes, where the applicant satisfies the criteria described in the FFO and forms. Please see section IV.A of the FFO and relevant forms for information about EDA requirements. Please see section IV.B of the FFO for USDA funding restrictions for this grant. Please see section Appendix C of the FFO and relevant forms for detailed information about ARC's requirements and Appendix D of the FFO and relevant forms for detailed information about DRA's requirements.

Matching Share Requirements

What is the minimum match required for the EDA portion?
Applicants must demonstrate a matching share (cash, in-kind, or a combination of cash and in-kind contributions), which must be available and committed to the project from non-Federal sources. The FFO states that projects may receive up to 80 percent of total project costs, based on the relative needs of the region in which the project will be located, as determined by EDA. EDA will give preference to proposals with higher matching shares to further leverage Federal funds and help ensure additional project impact. Applicants must submit Matching Share Commitment Letters at the time of application. For more information about EDA's matching requirements, see section 204(a) of PWEDA (42 U.S.C. § 3144) and 13 C.F.R. § 301.4(b)(1).

What is the minimum match required for the USDA portion?
The matching share required must be equal to the grant amount and be used in equal proportions.

Can the EDA required match be met through cash or in-kind?
EDA's matching share requirement may be met through in-kind contributions. Applications must also include Matching Share Commitment Letters. Details about EDA's matching share requirements are discussed in section IV.A.4 of the FFO.

Can the USDA required match be met through cash or in-kind?
The required matching share for USDA must be in cash or confirmed funding commitments.

Can the USDA required match be met through the use of other Federal funds?
Yes, other Federal funds may be used if the statue for the Federal program allows the funds to be used as matching and the purpose of the funds is an eligible purpose under this funding opportunity.

The USDA eligibility requirements state that the funds go to an 'intermediary' organization. Can the intermediary organization be a recipient if the organization is located in a rural area?
No, the intermediary, recipient and beneficiaries must be different.

Are Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds eligible for use as matching share for the EDA matching share requirement described in section IV.A.4 of the FFO?
Yes, section 105(a)(9) of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 expressly permits CDBG grantees to use their CDBG funds as the non-Federal matching share required by another Federal grant program. For the CDBG funds to be eligible for matching, however, a Federal grant program must have been listed in the community's

Statement of Activities and Review (the Statement of Activities and Review is a document that is prepared locally to obtain CDBG funds).